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ABSTRACT

One hundred four college students completed the Forty-Item Self-Disclosure Questionnaire (FISDQ) and neuroticism and social desirability subscales from the Comrey Personality Scales. Two weeks later, 76 of them volunteered for a study of handwriting analysis. The handwriting analysis was actually an attempt to obtain a behavioral measure of self-disclosure. Both the inappropriate disclosure and the non-linear hypotheses would have predicted a tendency for neurotics to score closer to the extremes on both self-disclosure measures. Nonsignificant "eta" values were interpreted as failure to support both hypotheses. The correlation between social desirability and handwriting disclosure was +.43; the correlation between social desirability and FISDQ was -.31. Both findings suggest that low disclosers are likely to present themselves in a socially desirable way. FISDQ scores were significantly related to handwriting disclosure, which was interpreted as marginal support for the validity of the FISDQ. (Author)

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Mental Health and the Measurement of Self-Disclosure

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Mental Health and the Measurement of Self-Disclosure

In spite of considerable speculation and a fair amount of research, the relationship between mental health and self-disclosure is still not clear. There is general agreement among psychologists that willingness to disclose is necessary for growth and self-actualization (Chaikin, Derlega, Bayma, & Shaw, 1975). The individual who discloses very little to anyone has been viewed by some clinicians as being mentally unhealthy (Derlega & Chaikin, 1975). Some studies do, in fact, show a positive relationship between mental health and self-disclosure (Halverson & Shore, 1969; Truax & Carkhuff, 1965; Taylor, Altman & Frankfurt).[1] However, this "old" and simplistic hypothesis has been contradicted by other studies that have reported negative relationships (Chaikin & Derlega, 1974; Cozby, 1972; Persons & Marks, 1970; Truax, Wittmer, & Altman, 1973), and still others that have found no relationship (Chaikin, Derlega, Bayma, & Shaw, 1975; Pedreson & Breglio, 1968; Stanley & Bownes, 1966).

Several reasons have been advanced for the existence of these contradictions. For one thing "mental health" was measured in different ways in the various studies (Chaikin, Derlega, Bayma, & Shaw, 1975). Secondly, there is doubt about the validity of questionnaire-type attempts to measure self-disclosure (Cozby, 1973). A third reason is that the relationship between mental health and self-disclosure may be non-linear (Cozby, 1973).

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[1] Taylor, D., Altman, I. and Frankfurt, L. Personality correlates of self-disclosure. Unpublished manuscript, Naval Medical Research Institute, Bethesda, Maryland, 1968.

One slightly more sophisticated hypothesis is an elaboration of this third reason. It holds that both high and low self-disclosure are indicative of poor mental health. The healthy person is willing to disclose a great deal to a few close friends and a moderate amount to most others. Poorly adjusted individuals show either high or low disclosure to almost everyone (Cozby, 1973). If this hypothesis is correct, the relationship between self-disclosure and mental health would be non-linear. Another hypothesis holds that neurotics are neither high nor low revealers, per se. Rather, they disclose inappropriately (Chaikin, Derlega, Bayma, & Shaw, 1975) in response to the self-disclosures of others. The supporting evidence for each hypothesis is quite meager.

One purpose of the present study is to examine the validity of these two hypotheses about mental health and self-disclosure. To test them, a modified version of Rubin's (1973) "airport technique" was employed. In Rubin's study subjects were approached in an airport lounge and asked to participate in a classroom project involving handwriting analysis. The experimenter first wrote either a "high intimacy" or "medium intimacy" statement about himself which ostensibly was used as a standard for handwriting analysis. Subjects read the statement then produced their own handwriting sample which was later analyzed for amount of self-disclosure. This method was used in order to reduce the refusal rate and defensiveness that often characterize laboratory studies of self-disclosure in which males are asked to describe themselves to other males. In the present study all of the experimenters' statements were of a medium level of intimacy.

A measure of social desirability was used primarily as a check on

the validity of neuroticism scores and secondarily as an additional variable to compare with self-disclosure. Since Tuckman (1966) found that high self-disclosers were likely to be oriented toward others, a positive relationship was predicted between social desirability and self-disclosure.

Since the validity of self-disclosure questionnaires has been questioned (Cozby, 1973), it was decided to use both a questionnaire and the less reactive measure employed by Rubin (1973). This enabled the present experimenter to compare scores on both dependent variables and check on the validity of the questionnaire. Jourard (1971, p. 121) has suggested that the failure of self-disclosure questionnaires to predict actual behavior is due to the questionnaire emphasis on revealing to parents and close friends while the actual disclosing behavior often involves total strangers. The choice of questionnaires in the present study allows for a test of this hypothesis. It was predicted that the relationship between total self-disclosure questionnaire scores and the handwriting measure of self-disclosure would be significantly weaker than the relationship between the handwriting measure and scores on the "same sex stranger" part of the questionnaire.

Method

Subjects

Fifty-three females and 51 males were administered the response bias (R) and the neuroticism (S) scale from the Comrey Personality Scales (Comrey, 1970) during their introductory psychology class. At the same time they filled out Jourard's (1971, p. 205) Forty Item Self-Disclosure Questionnaire (FISDQ). Two weeks later they were asked to participate in

an experiment "conducted by membars of my social psychology class." Seventy-six students volunteered to participate (37 males), including six who were absent from class during the administration of the scales. To reduce the possibility that high-disclosers would be over-represented among the volunteers (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1975) course credit was offered to diminish the overall percentage of "true" volunteers.

The Personality Measures

The S scale consists of 20 Likert-type items. High-scoring persons are described as "free of depression, optimistic and relaxed," while low scorers are described as neurotic. Scores of 75 and below for females and 77 and below for males were used as cut off points, as suggested by the norms for the test (Comrey, 1970). The R scale consists of 12 items designed to measure social desirability. High-scoring persons (57 + for females and 52 + for males) are apparently trying to look "nice."

The FISDQ asks the subject's willingness to reveal personal information in 40 topic areas to "someone in the past" and"a same-sex stranger on a first encounter." High scores indicate a willingness to reveal personal information to others.

Handwriting samples were analyzed for amount of self-disclosure using the system devised by Greene[2] with a score of 1 assigned to statements that were highly revealing and a score of 5 assigned to those that revealed practically nothing about the subject. The average amount of agreement among four judges (the author and 3 additional social psychology students) who were "blind" to subjects' scores on the other measures

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[2] Greene, R. (1964): A sentence-completion test for measuring self-disclosure. Unpublished master's thesis, Ohio State University.

was +.67. The dependent variable was the mean of the four judgments of the amount revealed by each subject.

Procedure

Students who volunteered to participate in the second part of the study reported to a large classroom (7 meters x 11 meters) where they were asked to sign in and have a seat. Each subject, in turn, was randomly assigned to a same-sex experimenter who was seated in a far corner of the room, about nine meters away. There were two male and two female experimenters, all chosen from the author's social psychology class. Three of the four were in their early twenties, while one female was about 40 years old. All of the experimenters and all but two of the subjects were Caucasian. A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant difference in subject self-disclosure that could be attributed to differences among the four experimenters.

Each subject was seated facing an experimenter at a distance of approximately one meter. The experimenter read the following statement: "I am participating in a classroom project in which we will be comparing handwriting samples. To give you a clearer idea of what I would like you to do, I will write a sentence or two about myself in the box below. You can look at my sample and then write a sentence or two about yourself in the bottom box. Do you understand?" The experimenter paused and then wrote: "My name is _____. Lately, I've been thinking about my relationships with other people. I've made many good friends over the years but I still feel lonely quite a bit." Due to a misunderstanding the first 14 subjects were allowed to move to a distance about six meters from

the experimenter to produce their handwriting samples. Data from these subjects were discarded or analyzed separately for some of the statistics employed. Then the experimenter said, "Now look at my sample and then write yours, please." This statement was chosen because it fit Greene's description of a moderate self-disclosure. Each subject's "handwriting sample" was later analyzed for level of self-disclosure.

The above procedure was adapted from Rubin (1973), who sought a measure of self-disclosure that did not make subjects overly defensive or unwilling to participate. Presenting the study as one dealing with handwriting analysis was designed to conceal the relationship between this part of the study and the questionnaire portion completed earlier. In fact, none of the subjects verbalized such a relationship prior to debriefing. Subjects were debriefed in class about two weeks after the experiment. At this time they were told some of the results of the study and they were invited to see their own scores by contacting the author outside of class.

Results

There was no significant difference between males ($\bar{x}$= 98.17) and females ($\bar{x}$= 98.40; t (103) = .92) on the FISDQ. The results on the "handwriting" measure showed a similar pattern, with the difference between males ($\bar{x}$= 3.38) and females ($\bar{x}$= 3.46; t (65)= .95, ns) being very small. Volunteers ($\bar{x}$= 98.29) were no more likely to be high disclosers than non-volunteers ($\bar{x}$= 99.66), as measured by FISDQ scores t (103)= .27,ns.

Subjects were assigned to one of five groups on the basis of the amount of self-disclosure shown on the FISDQ. Since a curvilinear relationship between the FISDQ measure of self-disclosure and S scale scores

was predicted, eta was used as a statistical measure. The value of eta was a nonsignificant .18 (4, 68). Subjects were also assigned to one of five groups on the amount of self-disclosure shown by the handwriting sample. The eta value expressing the relationship between "handwriting" self-disclosure and S scale scores was .14 (4,42). Scores approximately 1 standard deviation above and below the mean for the R scale ($\pm$ 7 points) were used to exclude about one-third of the subjects from each analysis.

The correlation between social desirability (R scores) and FISDQ scores was -.31 (103) $p < .01$, while the correlation between social desirability and handwriting self-disclosure was + .43 (51), $p < .001$.

The overall relationship between the two measures of self-disclosure was -.34 (51), $p < .01$. The relationship between the handwriting measure and the same-sex stranger part of the FISDQ was -.30 (51), $p < .02$.

Subjects whose handwriting measures of self-disclosure were produced away from the immediate presence of an experimenter were compared with those who faced the experimenter at close range. The former group revealed significantly more than the latter, t (65) = 3.75, $p < .01$.

Discussion

Although some studies show females higher on self-disclosure, the failure to find a sex difference in self-disclosure in the present study is consistent with a substantial portion of the research literature (see Cozby, 1973). It is also consistent with Jourard's (1964) and Plog's (1965) suggestion that sex differences in self-disclosure are less likely to occur in the northern United States. While the subjects in the present study are predominantly residents of a southern state, they live in the

northernmost highly suburban region of that state.

The nonsignificant relationships between both measures of self-disclosure and S scores argue against both the inappropriate disclosure hypothesis and the hypothesis that mentally healthy individuals are moderate disclosers. Since the statement modeled by the experimenters was of moderate revealingness, disclosure by neurotic subjects should have been either very high or very low in order to support the inappropriate disclosure hypothesis. The scores of neurotic subjects were distributed along both dimensions of self-disclosure in about the same way as the scores of emotionally stable subjects. The results of the present study suggest that self-disclosure does not appear to be related to neuroticism, at least as measured by the S scale. One unexplored possibility is that extremely high and extremely low disclosers are neurotic, but within a wide range of differing amounts of self-disclosure there is no relationship to neuroticism. Assuming that the typical experimental pool contains only one or two subjects who fall at the extremes on amount of self-disclosure, a statistical analysis would most likely fail to detect such a relationship. Further research with very high and low disclosers would appear to be warranted.

The relationships between R scores and the two measures of self-disclosure both show that high disclosers are less likely to present themselves in a socially desirable light. These results are inconsistent with those obtained by Doster and Strickland (1969) and Tuckman (1966). Perhaps the findings of the present study indicate that high self-disclosure is perceived by many as being socially undesirable. There is some experimental support for this idea. Cozby (1972) and Chaikin and Derlega (1974) found

that subjects regarded high self-disclosure as undesirable, inasmuch as they rated intimate disclosure to a stranger as both inappropriate and maladjusted.

The correlation of -.34 ($p < .01$) between the two measures of self-disclosure is the sort of result that satisfies everyone. Those who have defended the validity of self-disclosure questionnaires (Jourard, 1971, p. 168 ff.) can take comfort in the statistical significance of that correlation coefficient. Those who have been skeptical about the validity of such instruments (see Cozby, 1973) can point to the relatively low strength of the relationship. In any event Jourard's argument (1971, p. 121) that the validity of self-disclosure questionnaires can be increased by comparing similar target persons appears to be incorrect. The relationship between the handwriting measure and the same-sex stranger part of the FISDQ should have been considerably stronger than the overall FISDQ-handwriting measure correlation of -.34 in order to support this argument.

The mistake that permitted a few subjects to produce handwriting samples away from the immediate presence of an experimenter was an important one. The fact that subjects revealed less in the immediate presence of the experimenter is consistent with Kopfstein-Kent's (1975) data, which showed that some behaviors in a self-disclosure study were influenced by the presence or absence of an experimenter.

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